

Herald Sun

MONDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2001

Tracking graffiti artists

GRAFFITI would be photographed and catalogued to track offenders in a plan to be put to the State Government.

Vandals who "tag" public property would be forced through the courts to pay for accumulated costs of removing their work.

A lobby group has called for the hardline anti-graffiti strategy, successfully pioneered in South Australia, to be implemented across Victoria.

Residents Against Graffiti Everywhere (RAGE) is expanding statewide from its Cranbourne roots to gather strength in pushing the Government to adopt the program.

RAGE spokesman Steve Beardon said residents were appalled by graffiti and it was time the Government acted.

"Graffiti is unsightly, it lowers house values, it



Be warned: Onkaparinga's answer to graffiti.

intimidates residents and it attracts crime." Mr. Beardon said.

"People feel unsafe where there's a lot of graffiti, such as around train stations, because it's identified with crime and a lack of law and order."

"And we believe Victoria has the opportunity to be national leaders on this issue in partnership with local communities."

Under the system, an area is cleaned of graffiti, then any fresh scrawls are photographed, then cleaned off immediately, with the cost recorded on a database.

When an offender is caught, the council can seek payment of accumulated cleaning costs through the civil courts as a last resort.

Councils employ handwriting experts to prove a suspect is responsible for several different graffiti scrawls.

Mr. Beardon said the system worked because it discouraged graffiti, and recouped cleaning costs without saddling those responsible with a conviction.

The Graffiti Solution is the brainchild of KMA Konsult, whose program has operated successfully in Adelaide's City of Onkaparinga, for three years.

That council has been awarded \$80,000 through the courts from vandals, and has significantly reduced graffiti.

Hundreds of vandals have been forced to repay from \$30 to \$20,000 each.

One vandal was forced to repay \$20 a fortnight from his dole for the next 21 years.

A version of the program starts trial in the City of Stonnington this month.